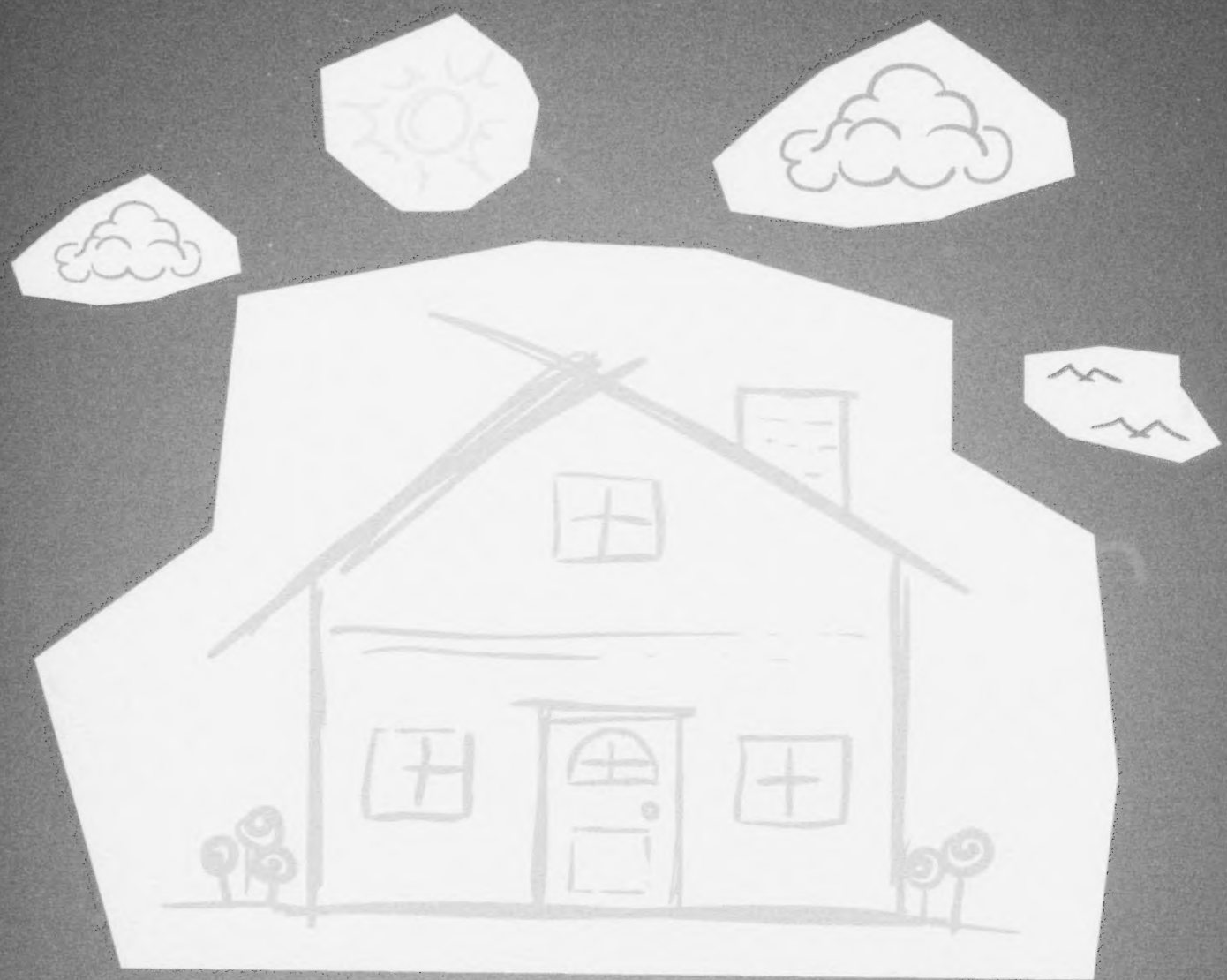

Final Report

Advisory Committee on Homelessness

Employment and Social Development Canada
Emploi et Développement social Canada

Canada

Advisory Committee on Homelessness – Final Report

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PDF
Cat. No.: Em12-43//2018E-PDF
ISBN: 978-0-660-26409-7

ESDC
Cat. No.: SSD-204-05-18E

Advisory Committee on Homelessness

Final Report

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INTRODUCTION

The Advisory Committee on Homelessness, chaired by Adam Vaughan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), was announced in June 2017. Consisting of 13 members from across the country with varied backgrounds, the Committee has worked diligently since the announcement through conference calls, online collaboration, in-person meetings and attendance at regional roundtables.

Committee members bring a wealth and diversity of experience to the table. Their collective membership spans policy, advocacy and community service provision, and many have been in this field for over 20 years. In addition, two members have their own lived experience[1] of homelessness and bring that perspective, and the perspective of their clients living in homelessness, to bear on each discussion.

We would like to formally acknowledge that the current Homelessness Partnering Strategy reflects existing and historic jurisdictional structures that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has identified as systemic barriers to reconciliation. However, one front-line worker who participated

[1] In this report, the phrase "people with lived experience" refers to individuals who have experienced homelessness.

in our engagement process declared that "housing people when done properly is reconciliation realized." Housing systems and individuals engaged in providing these services must evolve their practices to be consistent with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, and in particular the principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission must be used to guide how the recommendations in this report are interpreted, realized and localized as the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is changed and new services are developed.

The Committee accepts the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and understands that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is a piece of the larger discussion, which includes all orders of government and Indigenous Peoples and their organizations.

Overview

Homelessness affects a diverse cross-section of the population, including individuals and families, women fleeing violence, Indigenous Peoples, youth and seniors. Between 136,000 and 156,000 Canadians use an emergency shelter each year. Approximately 35,000 Canadians experience some form of homelessness on any given night. As of 2014, the average occupancy rate in Canada's approximately 15,000 emergency shelters had risen to over 90 percent, making it likely that shelters will have to turn people away because they are full.

Mortality rates are higher among people experiencing homelessness compared even to the poorest but housed segment of the Canadian population. As a result of related public spending on health, social and judicial services, the economic cost of homelessness is high. Some estimates indicate that it costs the Canadian economy over $7 billion annually.[2]

Indigenous Peoples are 10 times more likely to access homeless emergency shelters than non-Indigenous people, representing approximately 30 percent of all shelter users in 2014, while only representing approximately 5 percent of the Canadian population. As well, the Government of Canada has made commitments to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and is a signatory to the UNDRIP (see Appendix 1 for a list of applicable Calls to Action). To adequately support Indigenous communities who experience homelessness, these commitments must be respected.

The Role of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy

The Government of Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy is a community-based program focusing on preventing and reducing homelessness by funding 61 Designated Communities, urban Indigenous Peoples, as well as rural and remote communities across Canada. First launched in 2007, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy builds on the former National Homelessness Initiative, which was introduced in 1999.

[2] Gaetz, S., Dej, E., Richter, T., and Redman, M. (2014). The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. **http://homelesshub.ca/resource/state-homelessness-canada-2014**.

Recognizing that homelessness is a shared responsibility, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy works to enhance partnerships to find longer-term solutions to homelessness, strengthen community capacity and build sustainability. It supports research and knowledge sharing to foster a better understanding of homelessness, and it collects and promotes promising practices to help communities design the most effective responses.

The Government of Canada recognizes that it is not the only funder of homelessness programs across the country. In fact, federal investment in homelessness programming tends to be significantly less relative to funding from provincial, territorial and municipal and philanthropic investments. While there is significant variation across the country, community-level reporting under the Designated Communities stream (for communities outside of Quebec) suggest that on average for every dollar invested by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, $12.66 was contributed by provinces and territories and other partners in 2015–16. Provinces and territories were identified as the largest source of this amount, constituting approximately 68 percent of the national total.

Quebec's model of mandated multi-stakeholder service delivery and systems design programming, combined with independent front-line community service providers, was studied both in Montréal and Québec. Provincial government officials were present to provide additional context. The province's focus on prevention is a good practice and has had marked success. It has already substantially reduced chronic homelessness in the province. As such, the distinct funding agreements with Quebec should recognize this and sustain this community model based on local leadership and preventative supports for people with high acuity and core housing needs.

Many of the recommendations in this report are aimed at delivering a similar model in provinces and communities in Canada. Support for innovative supportive housing approaches is critical to the evolution of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and is necessary to lock in successes across Canada. In Halifax, the point was made that local programming should not have to change to fit the program; rather the program needs to model itself around local plans. This is especially true in Quebec.

Shared jurisdictional responsibility in this area makes the Homelessness Partnering Strategy program model unique. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy is designed so that communities, working in collaboration with all orders of government, use federal funding to leverage other sources of funds. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy works differently in Quebec through the Canada-Quebec Agreement, a formal agreement on funding, governance and project delivery.[3]

[3] In Quebec, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is administered through a formal Canada-Quebec Agreement that respects the jurisdiction and priorities of both governments in addressing homelessness. This agreement supports the Government of Quebec's priorities as outlined in its homelessness policy and action plan and the Government of Canada's priorities. The common priority for both governments is based on the *Stabilité résidentielle avec accompagnement* approach.

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy in the Context of the National Housing Strategy

Throughout the 2016 National Housing Strategy consultations, stakeholders emphasized the need for homelessness to be a key component of the Strategy, as a first step in helping the most vulnerable access safe, stable and secure housing. The ideas and recommendations heard through the National Housing Strategy consultations included:

- seek to eliminate homelessness;
- the Homelessness Partnering Strategy program must overlap and integrate seamlessly with the National Housing Strategy and provide increased, long-term, and predictable funding under a new national homelessness strategy;
- expand the number of Designated Communities eligible for core funding;
- maintain a commitment to Housing First and the prioritization of those experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness;
- address the needs of specific populations by providing for targeted adaptations to Housing First to address the unique needs of youth, Indigenous Peoples, women fleeing violence and veterans; and
- in conjunction with efforts to transition individuals experiencing homelessness into stable and permanent housing (outflow from homelessness), expand the Homelessness Partnering Strategy focus on, and investment in, homelessness prevention (inflow into homelessness).

Mandate and Activities of the Committee

The Committee is supporting the redesign of Employment and Social Development Canada's Homelessness Partnering Strategy after 2018–19.

During its mandate, the Committee has been asked to:

- explore in greater depth the ideas and the recommendations heard through the National Housing Strategy engagement process;
- undertake targeted engagement with homelessness experts and with communities and other stakeholders from across Canada;
- analyze specific options for the renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy; and
- provide their findings and options with respect to the redesign of the program to Minister Duclos.

The mandate and activities of the Committee are also shaped by Minister Duclos' commitment, through the National Housing Strategy, to reduce chronic homelessness by 50 percent by 2027-28.

In support of these activities, the Committee has met in person five times since June and members have attended roundtables in eight cities: Halifax, Toronto, Winnipeg, Vancouver, Yellowknife, Montréal, Québec and Calgary. Members also attended an engagement session with representatives from Community Advisory Board's and Community Entities at the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness' National Conference, in Winnipeg. In each location, they have heard widespread support for the Government of Canada's leadership in the area of homelessness through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. Further, Committee members have collectively and individually researched the growing body of evidence from jurisdictions where homelessness has been reduced, and undertaken their own engagement with stakeholders and their networks in their own regions and with organizations across the country and internationally.

Of particular note again were the sessions held in Montréal and Québec, and the tours that were conducted of supportive housing facilities in these cities. During these visits, while there was support for a Housing First model, it was clear that to sustain significant reductions in chronic homelessness, and to reinforce an important focus on prevention, intense supports in and out of the home were part of an evolved system of care and housing for people in precarious shelter conditions. Supports focused on a person's needs were vital to sustain success. While data, especially on intake, is more difficult to collect in this approach, it should still be part of the Canada-Quebec Agreement as a national system is desired and the causes of inflow and outflow need to be understood. It is also critical because distinct sub-populations may get underserved if left un-tracked.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee offers the following recommendations to the redesign of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.

1. A Permanent Lived Experience Advisory Panel

Discussion

The Committee believes in the importance of including people with lived experience of homelessness in all aspects of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy. This includes, allowing financial support for the inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness that is appropriate and fair at the community level, as well as creating a mechanism for inclusion at the national level.

Recommendations

1.1 Establish a permanent advisory panel of people with lived experience of homelessness that reflects the full diversity of homeless experiences to provide advice and guidance to Minister Duclos. This panel should receive financial and technical

support for its work. Support for the full participation of people with lived experience should be trauma-informed in order to facilitate the panelists' full participation. Resources for education and mentorship in order to take full advantage of the critically important role of people with lived experience can play in the policy is also seen as essential to support full participation.

1.2 The permanent advisory panel should also be reflective of Canada's diversity and seek participation from across the spectrum of those experiencing homelessness.

2. Adopting a national definition of homelessness

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy today does not have a definition of homelessness outside of the definition of chronic and episodic homelessness. As a result, homelessness for many Homelessness Partnering Strategy Designated Communities has been narrowly defined to emergency shelters or rough sleeping (i.e. sleeping outdoors). This can create barriers for some Canadians in accessing Homelessness Partnering Strategy-funded Housing First programs. It may also lead to a significant underestimation and misunderstanding of the scale and nature of homelessness in Canada.

Discussion

The lack of an agreed-upon and broader definition of homelessness creates a critical disadvantage to accessing Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds for women, youth, individuals who identify as LGBTQ2S, Indigenous Peoples and others who may avoid mainstream homeless systems, who would be considered "hidden homeless", or who may access other systems like violence against women shelters. It is also important to understand that homelessness is not a static state, but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.[4]

The lack of a broad definition will also lead the Government of Canada to significantly underestimate the scale and impact of homelessness and housing instability. A national definition for the Homelessness Partnering Strategy is not an attempt to override provincial, territorial and Indigenous autonomy in this policy area, and in particular local jurisdictions and sovereignty must be respected and engaged responsibly.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness definition of homelessness is based on international research, has been tested with Canadian stakeholders and has been widely adopted in communities across Canada. In addition, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness has developed an Indigenous definition of homelessness[5] that accounts for Indigenous

[4] Gaetz, S., Barr, C., Frieson, A., Harris, B., Hill, C., Kovacs-Burns, K., Pauly, B., Pearce, B., Turner, A., Marsolais, A. (2017). *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. **http://homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition**.

[5] Thistle, J. (2017). *Reframing the Discussion: An Indigenous Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. **http://homelesshub.ca/blog/reframing-discussion-indigenous-definition-homelessness**.

Peoples historical, experiential and cultural differences, as well as experiences of colonization and racism, in their experience of homelessness. This Indigenous definition of homelessness was released in fall 2017 and should also be considered in conjunction with the revised Canadian Observatory on Homelessness definition.

The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' revised definition was released in fall 2017 and is as follows:

> Homelessness describes the situation of an individual, family or community without stable, safe, permanent, appropriate housing, or the immediate prospect, means and ability of acquiring it. It is the result of systemic or societal barriers, a lack of affordable and appropriate housing, the individual/household's financial, mental, cognitive, behavioural or physical challenges, and/or racism and discrimination. Most people do not choose to be homeless, and the experience is generally negative, unpleasant, unhealthy, unsafe, stressful and distressing.
>
> Homelessness describes a range of housing and shelter circumstances, with people being without any shelter at one end, and being insecurely housed at the other. That is, homelessness encompasses a range of physical living situations, organized here in a **typology** that includes 1) **Unsheltered**, or absolutely homeless and living on the streets or in places not intended for human habitation; 2) **Emergency Sheltered**, including those staying in overnight shelters for people who are homeless, as well as shelters for those impacted by family violence; 3) **Provisionally Accommodated**, referring to those whose accommodation is temporary or lacks security of tenure, and finally, 4) **At Risk of Homelessness**, referring to people who are not homeless, but whose current economic and/or housing situation is precarious or does not meet public health and safety standards. It should be noted that for many people homelessness is not a static state but rather a fluid experience, where one's shelter circumstances and options may shift and change quite dramatically and with frequency.

The problem of homelessness and housing exclusion is the outcome of our broken social contract; the failure of society to ensure that adequate systems, funding and supports are in place so that all people, even in crisis situations, have access to housing and the supports they need. The goal of ending homelessness is to ensure housing stability, which means people have a fixed address and housing that is appropriate (affordable, safe, adequately maintained, accessible and suitable in size), and includes required

income, services and supports to enhance their well-being and reduce the risk that they will ever become homeless. This means focusing both on prevention and on sustainable exits from homelessness.

In the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the definition of homelessness recognizes the overrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples (including First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) amongst Canadian homeless populations resulting from colonization and cultural genocide. The Definition of Indigenous Homelessness in Canada highlights the necessity of considering the historical, experiential and cultural perspectives of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the ongoing experience of colonization and racism as central to understanding and addressing Indigenous homelessness. In addition, numerous populations, such as youth, women, families, people with mental health and/ or addictions issues, people impacted by violence, seniors, veterans, immigrants, refugees, ethno-racial and racialized people and members of LGBTQ2S communities experience homelessness due to a unique constellation of circumstances and as such the appropriateness of community responses has to take into account such diversity.[6]

Recommendations

2.1 The Government of Canada adopt a national definition and typology of homelessness such as provided above.

2.2 A definition of Indigenous homelessness has been developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness and it is recommended that it be applied across the Homelessness Partnering Strategy program where Indigenous Peoples are supported.

3. Coordinated local homeless systems

The greatest strength of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy program today is that it is community-based, and the community planning model has been a basis for collaboration in communities across the country. However, the community planning model has been programmatically focused (focused on individual program investments) versus community outcomes focused (a coordinated local system and programs focused on reducing homelessness). Experience in Canada and the United States has demonstrated the importance of taking a systemic approach by developing data-driven local homelessness systems.

[6] Gaetz, S., Barr, C., Frieson, A., Harris, B., Hill, C., Kovacs-Burns, K., Pauly, B., Pearce, B., Turner, A., and Marsolais, A. (2017). *Canadian Definition of Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. **http://homelesshub.ca/homelessdefinition**. It should be noted that a separate definition of youth homelessness has also been developed by the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

Discussion

Experience in Canada and the United States shows that reductions in chronic and episodic homelessness happen in communities with data-driven coordinated local homelessness systems. These systems are grounded in the Housing First philosophy and "coordinate diverse resources to ensure that efforts align with homelessness-reduction goals."[7]

There is an opportunity to change the Homelessness Partnering Strategy Community Plan for Designated Communities to be system plans that include, but are not limited to:

a. agreed time-bound homelessness prevention and reduction goals and milestones;

b. a plan to collect and maintain real-time data on everyone experiencing homelessness in the community and a means to track and report system-level outcomes (e.g. length of stay in shelter, flow into homelessness, actively homeless numbers, outflow, return to homelessness);

c. implementation of a Homelessness Management Information System (like HIFIS) to align data collection, reporting, intake, assessment and referrals to enable coordinated service delivery;

d. a process for ongoing engagement of people with lived experience;

e. development of a coordinated access system that uses common assessment tools[8] to prioritize clients and match them with available housing and support;

f. a performance management and quality assurance process to monitor and improve implementation of the plan and performance of funded programs;

g. system mapping identifying current housing and services and identification of gaps;

h. integration of population-specific plans, including strategies to prevent and reduce the homelessness of youth, Indigenous Peoples, individuals who identify as LGBTQ2S and people with disabilities; and

i. a process to enable system integration with Indigenous, municipal, provincial, territorial and/or federal systems, with attention paid to people exiting institutional care or custody (e.g. foster care, prison, hospital).

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[7] Turner, A. (2014). *Beyond Housing First: Essential Elements of a System Planning Approach*. The School of Public Policy Research Papers, volume 7, issue 30, October 2014.

[8] Because the causes and conditions of youth homelessness are unique, it is recommended that communities utilize youth-specific and strengths-based assessments. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy should consider review and approval of assessment tools and support for the development of population-specific assessments.

Under this model, the federal government would fund and support Designated Communities to achieve community-level homelessness reduction outcomes, rather than focusing on individual community program investments. The Community Plan becomes the community system plan to achieve these outcomes.

This approach significantly changes the roles and responsibilities within Designated Communities. The role of Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards will need to be redefined to ensure strong leadership with a focus on performance management, quality assurance and improvement, system planning, data collection and analysis and regular community reporting. Experience in Canada and the United States have shown that strong, active and outcome-focused local leadership is a critical success factor in preventing and reducing homelessness.

The Committee has noted concerns from across Canada about inconsistent interpretation of Homelessness Partnering Strategy directives and requirements in the implementation of Housing First through Service Canada. With a new focus on community-level homelessness outcomes, the Government should review whether it would be more efficient and effective to have a direct supervisory and support relationship between the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and Designated Communities and whether Service Canada's services are required.

Recommendations

3.1 It is recognized and understood that the funding for the program in the province of Quebec flows through a separate agreement and negotiated with the Quebec government. While the recommendations in this report have been made in collaboration with stakeholders in the province, specific funding thresholds and specific policy directions need to respect this process before being applied to Quebec agencies and organizations.

3.2 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy be restructured to help communities create data-driven coordinated local homeless systems focused on preventing and reducing homelessness, with the hope of ending it. The program should be reviewed on an ongoing basis thereafter.

3.3 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy consult with Community Entities and Community Advisory Boards and create an expert advisory committee to:

- support the development of a community system planning model to replace the Community Plan;
- support defining the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities required to achieve implementation of the community system planning model; and
- provide advice on the future roles and responsibilities of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and Service Canada.

3.4 The Government require a community-led transition plan before 2019, giving communities until fiscal 2021–22 for coordinated systems to be implemented. Reporting mechanisms, including outcomes reporting, would be phased-in in a coordinated manner. The plan should be developed with the full and meaningful participation of people with lived experience of homelessness.

3.5 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy provide training and technical assistance to support communities through the transition.

3.6 Funding to Designated Communities be increased to build capacity for an expanded leadership role inclusive of lived experience, to support local data collection and analysis, and fund key aspects of system integration like coordinated access systems.

3.7 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy provide support for integration or connection with other Indigenous, municipal, provincial and/or federal systems (e.g. health, corrections, child welfare).

4. Developing a national data strategy

In a systems approach to preventing and reducing homelessness, data and data systems play a central role in local homeless system coordination, planning, performance management and quality improvement. Nationally, to ensure it is making progress on its homelessness objectives, the Government needs high-quality data from communities with the appropriate data infrastructure in place to collect, secure, analyze and share information. This includes working with the Violence Against Women sector to collect statistics and create a more complete picture of homelessness. This would be a significant change from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's current approach to data collection and use.

Discussion

Experience from Canada and the United States demonstrates the importance of knowing, in real time, everyone who is experiencing homelessness in a community. This actionable, person specific data is key to efficiently targeting and prioritizing interventions, understanding the functioning of the homeless system, targeting prevention efforts and measuring progress against the objective of reducing chronic homelessness. This is a significant change from the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's current approach to data collection and use.

Today, the Homelessness Partnering Strategy collects homelessness data and information via four main sources:

1. **Shelter use data** from service providers, including those using the **Homeless Individuals and Families Information System (HIFIS)** which is developed and supported by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy.
2. **Point-in-Time Counts** and surveys in emergency shelters, outdoors and other locations conducted in 32 communities in 2016 and planned for more than 60 communities in 2018.
3. The **National Service Provider List**, a continually updated national inventory of homelessness service providers, including information on service type and populations served.
4. **Results reporting** from projects funded by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, including project outcomes and populations served.

The newest version of the HIFIS system (HIFIS4) has the potential to meet the technology needs of communities shifting to a systems approach, which gives the Homelessness Partnering Strategy communities a significant technological head start. It also opens the door to developing a comprehensive national picture of homelessness and housing need in Canada while having real-time visibility of community by community progress on reducing chronic and episodic homelessness.

Recommendation

4.1 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy develop a new National Data Strategy to develop a comprehensive national assessment of homelessness in Canada and support the shift to data driven local homeless systems including:

- engaging people with lived experience and expertise of homelessness in the development of the national data strategy and the implementation of local data systems;
- including individual rights and privacy protections in the design and the implementation of a national data strategy;
- collecting real-time data on everyone experiencing homelessness in Canada, including those living in violence against women shelters and other provisional housing;
- providing communities with a means for tracking and reporting system level outcomes (e.g. length of stay in shelter, flow into homelessness, actively homeless numbers, outflow, return to homelessness);
- developing a means of ensuring transparency and public reporting of homelessness statistics and outcomes;
- implementing Homelessness Management Information Systems in communities to align data collection, public reporting, intake, assessment and referrals to enable coordinated service delivery;

- implementation of enhanced data collection should prioritize youth experiencing homelessness and those who are chronically homeless and seek to develop data that uncovers the public system interactions contributing to homelessness (e.g. aging out of the child welfare systems); and
- ensuring Employment and Social Development Canada has the capacity to provide an ongoing comprehensive national assessment of homelessness in Canada including real-time public reporting of community-level homelessness data.

5. Housing First[9]

The renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2014 signalled a distinctive shift for the federal government, incorporating Housing First as a policy and funding priority. Housing First is defined as "a recovery-oriented approach to ending homelessness that involves moving people who experience homelessness into independent and permanent housing as quickly as possible, without preconditions, and then providing them with additional supports and services as needed."[10]

The Housing First philosophy and approach enjoy broad support and is seeing growing successful implementation across Canada. Housing First continues to be key to preventing and reducing homelessness. Over the last three years, a lot has been learned through national implementation, but several areas for improvement have been identified by the Committee.

Discussion

During the renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2014, the program established investment targets for the Designated Communities and Indigenous Homelessness streams in communities of a certain size and phased them in over time. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy also prioritized the targeting of that investment to individuals, often with disabling conditions, who are chronically homeless (the Homelessness Partnering Strategy currently defines as currently homeless and having been homeless for six months or more in the past year) or episodically homeless (defined as currently homeless and having experienced three or more episodes[11] of homelessness in the past year).

The Committee also discussed the funding allocation and agreed that maintaining the current Housing First targets was prudent to enable communities to move towards ending homelessness.

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[9] Note that Housing First is managed differently in Quebec under the Canada-Quebec Agreement on theHomelessness Partnering Strategy.

[10] Gaetz, S., Scott, F. and Gulliver, T. (2013). *Housing First in Canada: Supporting Communities to End Homelessness*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Homelessness Research Network. pg. 2. **http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/HousingFirstInCanada_0.pdf**.

[11] Episodes are defined as periods when a person would be in a shelter or place not fit for human habitation, and after at least 30 days, would be back in the shelter or inhabitable location.

Employment and Social Development Canada and the Committee have heard concerns from key stakeholders, notably Community Entities, about conditions placed on Housing First in the Homelessness Partnering Strategy context. Specifically, some stakeholders believe that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy requirements restrict communities from investing in their local priorities and there are concerns that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy prioritizes those who experience chronic and episodic homelessness, at the expense of other vulnerable subgroups (e.g. youth or women fleeing violence). Others have noted a difficulty with meeting Housing First investment targets, in part due to the availability of affordable housing, or have difficulty adapting Housing First to local context given restrictions on eligible expenses.

Prioritization

The Homelessness Partnering Strategy implementation of Housing First prioritizes investments to chronically homeless individuals. The National Housing Strategy continues this prioritization and commits to a 50 percent reduction by 2027–28. This target means that people have to be homeless for over six months in a year or have repeated episodes of homelessness before they can be eligible for Housing First funding. The National Housing Strategy targeting appears to further limit this targeting to emergency shelter users. The Committee agrees that this prioritization is critical, but notes that the unintended consequence of this policy is that people with very complex needs could be left to languish in homelessness until they meet the chronological threshold. This invariably means their health, mental health and other conditions deteriorate even more. Further, adopting the National Housing Strategy prioritization of the chronically homeless shelter users will exclude women, youth and LGBTQ2S people from accessing the majority of Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding because many of these people will avoid or not access homelessness emergency shelters.

Moreover, it is important to note that to reduce chronic homelessness in Canada communities will need to reduce the flow of people into chronic homelessness. Most often, the flow into chronic homelessness is related to homeless people with complex needs aging into chronicity, often with a deeper level of need than they might otherwise have had if intervention had happened earlier.

One way to deal with these concerns is to amend the prioritization of Housing First investments to include homeless individuals who are assessed as having situational vulnerability and high acuity (e.g. having complex needs and being at risk of death from homelessness). Acuity can be assessed through several evidence-based assessment tools. The Homelessness Partnering Strategy should ensure, in consultation with Community Entities, a consistent national approach to vulnerability assessment by reviewing and approving the available tools for use in Homelessness Partnering Strategy-funded programs. New tools should be reviewed regularly and draw on population-specific dynamics, particularly with respect to Indigenous Peoples, youth and women.

Tailoring Housing First

A key learning in the national implementation of Housing First is that the Housing First model must be adapted to local conditions (e.g. funding, community size, local housing type and availability), and must be tailored to meet the unique needs of different populations (e.g. youth, women, veterans, Indigenous Peoples). The Housing First model lends itself to ready adaption, but current Homelessness Partnering Strategy directives can limit adaptation.

The Committee also notes that in adapting Housing First, care has to be taken to maintain fidelity to the core elements of the model, and communities would need support through the implementation process.

The Committee notes that work in developing toolkits to guide population-based adaptations is currently underway through Homelessness Partnering Strategy-funded projects with the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, A Way Home Canada and the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness.

Recommendations

5.1 Maintain funding allocation and the current Housing First targets to enable communities to move towards ending homelessness (65 percent could be achieved through multiple funding sources).

5.2 Maintain prioritization of the Homelessness Partnering Startegy investment to people experiencing chronic and episodic homelessness, but amend the prioritization to include homeless individuals who are assessed as having situational vulnerability and high acuity (e.g. representing more complex co-occurring issues that impact overall health and housing stability).

5.3 Amend the goal of the National Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, to be a 50 percent reduction of chronic and high acuity homelessness, aligned with a more inclusive national definition of homelessness.

5.4 Develop criteria's under which Designated Communities could reallocate Housing First investment targets to prevention investments to support prevention and reduction of chronic homelessness (e.g. to fill a gap in provincial funding, to create a prevention- or population-based program targeting inflow into chronic homelessness or reallocation of funding once functional zero chronic homelessness is achieved).

5.5 Develop national guidelines and an accreditation process to ensure high-quality Housing First implementation that respects and acknowledges the separate agreement concerning Quebec.[12]

[12] The Committee notes that the Province of Quebec was developing a customized provincial approach to Housing First and could also have a parallel set of guidelines and accreditation process.

5.6 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy conduct a review of its Housing First directives in consultation with Community Entities, Community Advisory Boards, experts, people with lived experience of homelessness and Housing First programs to remove barriers to the adaptation of Housing First to local conditions and homeless populations. This review should also include an examination of housing supports for housing retention outside of a Housing First program.

5.7 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy should ensure, in consultation with Community Entities, a consistent national approach to vulnerability assessment by reviewing and approving the available tools for use in Homelessness Partnering Strategy-funded programs. New tools should be reviewed regularly and draw on population-specific dynamics particularly with respect to Indigenous Peoples, youth and women.

6. Expanding the number of Homelessness Partnering Strategy Designated Communities

The expansion and extension of Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding announced in Budget 2017 offers an opportunity to expand the number of Designated Communities to meet the needs of communities currently not funded, or perhaps underfunded, relative to local need.

Discussion

Since 1999, the Government of Canada has targeted its investments in 61 Designated Communities across the country. As a first step in determining which new communities may be added in expanding the number of Homelessness Partnering Strategy communities, census data from Statistics Canada was gathered for communities with populations over 30,000 which are not currently funded through Homelessness Partnering Strategy Designated Community funding. These communities were examined using a series of key indicators (e.g. population size, Indigenous population, shelter capacity, unemployment rate, vacancy rate and incidence of server core housing needs) compared to the current Designated Communities. In addition, each of these communities was scanned using media, city-based websites and community-developed reports to understand the public profile of homelessness and how it is being addressed.

The expansion of Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding to new Designated Communities was supported by the Committee, but the Committee wanted to ensure that adding new Designated Communities should not come at the expense of existing communities and the criteria for adding new Designated Communitiess should be based on more transparent and rigorous methodology, with data that clearly demonstrates need (e.g. Point-in-Time Counts).

The Committee also notes that the length of the renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy creates opportunities for adjustment in funding levels and the addition of new communities as need changes over the decade of this renewal. The challenge in this scenario, however, is that communities should not be penalized for success in reducing homelessness by losing Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding when homelessness is reduced. Sustaining success will require ongoing investments.

Recommendations

6.1 The Committee supports the addition of new Designated Communities, but stresses that new funds should not come at the expense of existing communities. Those communities should be added based on demonstrated need using an open and transparent process. The Committee recommends that Employment and Social Development Canada hold a two-step competitive process based on available funding that is open to any community:[13]

- The first step of the process would be an open call for expressions of interest. Communities responding to this call would be expected to outline need (an analysis of homelessness in the community) and readiness to become a Designated Community (e.g. having an agreed-upon community leader and indications of support from their provincial government, health system, municipal government, housing authorities mental health care providers and other key stakeholders).
- The second step would be an invitation to submit a full application sent to a shortlist of communities from the expression of interest process. This community application, developed with financial support from Employment and Social Development Canada, would require a detailed enumeration of homelessness (using Point-in-Time Count, Registry Week, Period Prevalence Count or other approved methodology) and the development of a community plan to prevent and reduce chronic homelessness.

6.2 Employment and Social Development Canada develop a process for monitoring changing community needs and adjusting funding over time.

[13] Communities captured under the new northern stream would have a separate process.

7. Addressing the needs of sub-populations at risk of homelessness

7.1 Addressing Indigenous homelessness

Indigenous Peoples are significantly over-represented among Canada's homeless population as a result of colonization. This issue should be reflected in Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding and policies.

Discussion

According to the National Shelter Study, it is estimated that between 38,080 and 45,820 Indigenous Peoples used a shelter in 2014. Overall, statistics show that the rate of shelter use for Indigenous Peoples is 10 times higher than for non-Indigenous people. When compared with rates of shelter use by non-Indigenous people, shelter use is 20 times higher for Indigenous seniors, and 13 times higher for Indigenous adults. 32 percent of Indigenous shelter users were female compared to 23.5 percent of nonIndigenous shelter users.[14]

The percentage of shelter users who report Indigenous ancestry varied widely by community, from less than 5 percent in some suburban communities to over 90 percent in many northern communities. In each of the communities where data is available, Indigenous Peoples are over-represented in homeless shelters compared to the general population.[15] Given that the National Shelter Study only included emergency shelters in the homeless systems, this is certainly an underestimation of Indigenous homelessness in Canada.

Committee members discussed the unique and difficult circumstances facing Indigenous Peoples and their significant over-representation in the homeless population. Members felt strongly that the way forward for the program should be guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, as well as the nation-to-nation, Inuit-Crown and government-to-government relationships that the Government of Canada has committed to with First Nations, Inuit and Métis. The Committee was informed that discussions with First Nations, Inuit and Métis on the Homelessness Partnering Strategy supports were underway.

While measures contained in this final report will help reduce homelessness for Indigenous Peoples (e.g. a national definition of homelessness, tailoring Housing First, refocusing prioritization for Housing First funding, prevention, increased funding for the territories), the Committee did feel the funding currently allocated to addressing Indigenous homelessness was insufficient and that further discussion on Indigenous homelessness by the Committee was needed.

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[14] Segaert, A., (2016). *National Shelter Study 2005-2014*. Gatineau, QC: Employment and Social Development Canada. **https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/reports-shelter-2014.html**.

[15] Segaert, A., (2016). *National Shelter Study 2005-2014*. Gatineau, QC: Employment and Social Development Canada. **https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/communities/homelessness/reports-shelter-2014.html**.

Recommendations

7.1.1 The Committee recommends that Employment and Social Development Canada establish an advisory panel of Indigenous service providers, people with lived experience of homelessness, youth and jurisdictional experts to provide the program with input and advice on an ongoing basis.

7.1.2 The Committee recommends for the Indigenous stream that the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness definition for Indigenous homelessness be used as the program is designed and delivered.[16]

7.1.3 The Committee recommends that the Indigenous funding stream be increased, that this stream be Indigenous led, designed and delivered, and that a gender lens be applied in this process.

7.1.4 The Committee recommends that all Homelessness Partnering Strategy directives be reviewed through an Indigenous cultural lens and that Indigenous-led and designed training and cultural capacity programming be identified as a key component of funding agreements for all other funding streams.

7.1.5 All non-Indigenous streams are accountable for ensuring cultural competency for those agencies serving Indigenous Peoples.

7.2 Addressing women's homelessness

The Committee feels the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, as it is currently structured, does not adequately address the unique needs of women experiencing homelessness. Further, changes to the program that prioritized chronic and episodic homelessness inadvertently excluded many women from eligibility for Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding.

Discussion

Women experience homelessness and housing instability differently than men. There are many factors that make many women vulnerable to homelessness, including poverty, lower wages, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, addiction issues and mental and physical health challenges. The 2016 coordinated Point-in-Time count found 39 percent of respondents experiencing homelessness self-identify as women. The results of the National Shelter Study 2004-2015, identified 27.3 percent of shelter users as women. This data almost certainly underestimates homelessness amongst women in Canada. Some women may to access choose homeless service providers as a last resort after exhausting all other options, which are not included in homelessness statistics.

Results from the 2016 National Shelter Study show that the increase in the length of shelter stays is especially evident among families, often headed by single women, whose typical stay lengths more than doubled between 2005–2014, to reach 22 days

[16] The definition can be found on the Homeless Hub website at: **http://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness**.

leading to a high occupancy rate at family shelters. In 2014, the average occupancy rate at family shelters was 86.3 percent, much higher than the 67.3 percent occupancy rate reported in 2005.

Unable to secure temporary or permanent housing to escape from violence, many women end up in a continuing cycle of violence. They often find themselves on the streets where they are highly vulnerable to physical, emotional and psychological harm. Homelessness exposes women to increased risk of sexual violence, exploitation and trafficking. For example, they may be forced to trade sex for temporary accommodation, or stay in unsafe abandoned buildings and overcrowded housing. Many women will avoid accessing supports for fear of losing their children to child welfare systems and avoid mixed gender shelters for safety reasons.

It is also important to note that existing mainstream homeless systems, and most existing Housing First programs, are built around the needs of men who make up the majority of clients.

These issues are further compounded for Indigenous women who struggle with additional challenges of colonization, intergenerational trauma and racism.

The Committee feels that the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, as it is currently structured, does not adequately address the unique needs of women experiencing homelessness because women experiencing homelessness are often not considered homeless for the purposes of Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding.

The lack of an agreed-upon definition of homelessness creates a critical disadvantage to accessing Homelessness Partnering Strategy funds for women. As discussed, women may avoid mainstream homeless systems, may be a part of the "hidden homeless"/provisionally accommodated or may access other systems like violence against women shelters. In many communities, women experiencing homelessness are not considered homeless because they do not access the mainstream homeless system (e.g. emergency homeless shelters). The prioritization of chronic homelessness inadvertently excludes many women for being eligible for Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding because chronic homelessness is interpreted as chronically homeless emergency shelter users (where women are often under-represented) and chronically homeless individuals (many women are accompanied by children in homelessness) and does not consider the high degrees of situational vulnerability and high acuity homeless women often experience.

The Committee applauds the Government's Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) of the National Housing Strategy and the targeting of 25 percent of all National Housing Strategy resources towards housing for women. However, as discussed earlier, the Government has inadvertently perpetuated the disadvantage of women experiencing homelessness by targeting a 50 percent reduction in the chronically homeless population, the majority of which are men. Unless the unique way women experience homelessness is explicitly acknowledged and included, women experiencing homelessness will continue to be systematically underserved by Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding.

The Committee also strongly supports the addition of the Canada Housing Benefit in the National Housing Strategy. As the National Housing Strategy noted, "55% of Canadian households in core housing need are female-led."[17] The Canada Housing Benefit could be important to supporting homelessness prevention programs for women experiencing core housing need, housing instability and homelessness. It will be critical that the Canada Housing Benefit prioritizes those in greatest need, specifically households living in core housing need (which are disproportionately female-led) and those experiencing homelessness.

Recommendations

7.2.1 The Committee recommends that any definition of homelessness adopted by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy reflect the unique experiences of women, including women living in and experiencing violence.

7.2.2 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy standards for Housing First should include adaptation of the Housing First model to meet the unique needs of women.

7.2.3 Communities undertaking a coordinated systems approach to ending homelessness should include organizations that provide services to women and be reflective of how women experience homelessness.

7.2.4 As part of developing a consistent national approach to vulnerability assessment, all new and existing tools should be analyzed to ensure they accurately address the unique needs of women experiencing homelessness.

7.2.5 A National Homelessness Data Strategy should include violence against women shelters and take care to understand how women experience homelessness and housing instability to ensure their homelessness and housing instability are accurately captured in local and national analysis.

7.2.6 The language that sets a 50 percent reduction in chronic homeless shelter users in the National Housing Strategy is framed in such a way that it is explicitly discriminatory towards women because of the way they experience homelessness and are less frequent users of shelters. The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada revisit and revise this language.

[17] Government of Canada. (2017). *Canada's National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home*. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. pg.11. **https://www.placetocallhome.ca/**

7.3 Addressing youth homelessness

Youth homelessness was an area of specific concern for the Committee, which noted the extreme vulnerability and high level of risk faced by young people experiencing homelessness. Addressing youth homelessness will be an important component in preventing and reducing chronic and episodic homelessness.

"Youth homelessness" refers to the situation and experience of young people between the ages of 13 and 24 who are living independently of parents and/or caregivers, but do not have the means or ability to acquire a stable, safe or consistent residence.[18]

Discussion

Committee members noted that:

- recent Canadian research shows that homeless youth have very acute levels of need (which if they were housed, meant that they would require something between inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care levels) and many have their first experience of homelessness at a very young age;
- compared to the general public (Statistics Canada, 2011), youth experiencing homelessness are 193 times more likely to have been involved with the child welfare system than the general public;[19]
- homeless youth are at risk of mental health issues, sexual exploitation and criminal victimization and already exhibit a high degree of chronicity and vulnerability;
- young people exiting from public systems, including child welfare, corrections and inpatient health/mental health care, are particularly vulnerable to homelessness and the resulting negative consequences;
- homophobia and transphobia are drivers of youth homelessness resulting in an over-representation of LGBTQ2S youth in the homeless population;
- preventing and reducing youth homelessness will be key to meeting Minister Duclos' objective to cut chronic homelessness by 50 percent, as today's homeless youth quickly become tomorrow's chronically homeless adults; and
- the strategies to reduce youth homelessness are similar to those proposed in this report (e.g. system planning, Housing First, prevention), but must be developed and implemented based on the needs of developing adolescents and young adults, and can be integrated into the redesign of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy outlined in these recommendations.

[18] Canadian Observatory on Homelessness. (2012). *Canadian Definition of Youth Homelessness*. The Homelessness Hub: **http://homelesshub.ca/resource/canadian-definition-youth-homelessness**.

[19] Nichols, N., Schwan, K., Gaetz, S., Redman, M., French, D., Kidd, S., O'Grady, B. (2017) *Child Welfare and Youth Homelessness in Canada: A Proposal for Action*. Toronto, ON: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. **http://homelesshub.ca/sites/default/files/ChildWelfare-PolicyBrief-final_0.pdf**.

While Committee members note provincial jurisdiction over the systems that impact youth homelessness in Canada, they feel the federal government could play an important leadership role in the prioritization of preventing and reducing youth homelessness.

Recommendations

7.3.1 Support communities to integrate targeted and comprehensive youth strategies into community planning in a way that reflects the diversity of lived experience, including Indigenous youth, young women and LGBTQ2S youth. For communities with a youth action plan, ensure coordination with the main community plan and an intake system that accommodates the needs of youth.

7.3.2 Support the deployment of innovative program models based on the needs of youth, and which support rapid exits from homelessness (e.g. Housing First for Youth, adapted youth transitional housing), and may include different models of accommodation.

7.3.3 Given the different risks associated with exposure to homelessness for young people, there should be a focus on prevention, safe and effective transitions from child protection, enhancements to family and natural supports, school-based early intervention and place-based supports such as Host Homes and Youth Reconnect.

7.3.4 Support communities to proactively address the needs of LGBTQ2S youth through policy, program, practice and training.

7.3.5 Minister Duclos support the creation of a Federal/Provincial-Territorial Youth Homelessness Committee. This committee would be a forum for greater alignment of policy, funding and share best practices. It would also be responsible for developing a pan-Canadian youth homelessness strategy. It would be comprised of senior-level officials responsible for department portfolios that carry policy responsibility for youth, homelessness, mental health and addictions, child welfare, justice and education.

7.3.6 Increase knowledge and data collection on youth homelessness.

7.3.7 Support communities to develop coordinated intake systems for Housing First that accommodate the specific needs of youth. Blending youth and adult services and co-locating intake processes or delivery of programs constitutes a high-risk situation for young people and should be avoided wherever possible.

8. Increased funding for the territories

Canada's territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut) face unique housing and homelessness challenges for many reasons. These unique circumstances warrant special consideration of the specific needs of each territory in a renewed and redesigned Homelessness Partnering Strategy program. It is critical that the community-led model in the provinces be replicated in the territories. Reliance only on territorial or municipal governments for the delivery of services is creating significant gaps as key populations go unserved because of jurisdictional limitations and policies.

Discussion

Unique housing and homelessness challenges, including climate, short construction season, a lack of easily accessible building materials and changing environmental conditions, make housing and related infrastructure extremely expensive to build and maintain in Canada's territories.

Homelessness in the territories is often manifested in over-crowding and hidden homelessness (e.g. couch surfing), which makes counting of the homeless population difficult. In many communities, there is a shortage of vacant housing to implement the Housing First model and move individuals out of homelessness.

The 2015 Point-in-Time Count in Yellowknife revealed 139 homeless individuals, of which 91 percent self-identified as Indigenous. The 2015 Point-in-Time Count in Whitehorse revealed 219 individuals, 78 percent of whom identified as Indigenous. In Nunavut, the 2014 Point-in-Time Counts in Iqaluit, Cambridge Bay and Rankin Inlet estimated the territory's homeless population at approximately 100, although when considering hidden homelessness, the estimated total increases significantly to 1,200.[20]

Under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, regional funding is delivered through the Designated Communities, Indigenous Homelessness and Rural and Remote funding streams. The three territorial capitals, Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Iqaluit, are the only Designated Communities in the territories.

Recommendation

8.1 The Committee recommends the creation of a dedicated territorial funding stream, modelled on the Designated Communities stream, for the three territories in order to better address homelessness in these areas. The development of a territorial funding stream should be done in consultation with territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments, and must be Indigenous-led with a gender lens applied.

[20] See: *"Let's Build a Home Together" Framework for the GN Long-Term Comprehensive Housing and Homelessness Strategy*.

9. Re-focusing national funding

There is an important role for a dedicated national funding stream under the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, but the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness funding as it is currently designed has several challenges.

Discussion

The Committee supports a national funding stream as an important asset for capacity building and innovation. However, the Innovative Solutions to Homelessness funding in its current form does not have widespread support from members given that there are several issues with the way in which the funding is currently being utilized. Small grants are insufficient to stimulate innovation in any meaningful way and are not, in large part, scalable.

The Committee feels the national funding stream could be re-focused to have greater impact on the Government's homelessness prevention and reduction objectives.

Recommendation

9.1 The national funding stream should be maintained at its current allocation level or be increased, while focusing on priority activities, including:

- innovation grants for demonstration projects and research targeted specifically to support homelessness reduction, prevention and adaptations of Housing First;
- community capacity building and sector transformation focused on getting communities ready for renewal (e.g. system planning, coordinated access and Housing First adaptation). This would include training, technical assistance and knowledge mobilization. Knowledge mobilization activities may include innovations that are new to a jurisdiction, but may be in use elsewhere;
- invest in projects that build the capacity of people with lived experience of homelessness to participate in or lead policy and program design activities and funding applications; and
- develop a national data strategy to build out the implementation of HIFIS.

10. Prevention

To achieve the federal government's homelessness objectives, reducing the flow of people into homelessness and ensuring successful exit from homelessness will be critical.

Discussion

The renewal of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2014 signalled a significant shift in the federal government's response to homelessness. The integration of Housing First into the Homelessness Partnering Strategy's mandate and directives has focused attention and investment towards moving people, especially

those experiencing long stays in shelter and/or on the street, into permanent housing with the supports necessary to ensure long-term housing stability. This is an important step forward in ending homelessness in Canada.

There is broad consensus, however, that achieving long-term reductions in homelessness in Canada requires an approach that emphasizes both prevention and successful exits from homelessness. Policies, programs and investment focused on reducing the number of individuals and families that become homeless each year (i.e. inflow to the system) are as important as investment in services that help those who are already homeless to re-enter housing (i.e. outflow from the system).

The Committee feels it is important to have a definition of homelessness prevention. The Committee proposes that homelessness prevention include:

- policies, practices, and interventions that reduce the likelihood that someone will experience homelessness. It also means providing those who have been homeless with the necessary resources and supports to stabilize their housing, enhance integration and social inclusion, and ultimately reduce the risk of the recurrence of homelessness.[21]

In other words, investments must focus on "housing-led" initiatives that either enable people to retain their housing and avoid homelessness, or assist those who have exited homelessness with necessary supports to prevent its recurrence. Services and supports provided to people in an emergency context, for instance helping people improve their health, develop life skills, etc., may be beneficial and considered as part of a community plan, but these services should not form the core of any system plan to prevent homelessness. The major focus of the program should continue to be placed on actively and directly housing people.

The federal government can build alignment around a common definition and set clear directives (including guidelines and parameters) as to what homelessness prevention entails within the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, building from the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness' Prevention Framework.

Recommendations

10.1 Set aside grants from the national funding stream for demonstration projects and research targeted specifically to support building the evidence base for homelessness prevention and the adaptation of Housing First to prevent homelessness (e.g. Housing First to prevent discharge from corrections into homelessness). This process should include the involvement of people with lived experience of homelessness.

[21] Gaetz, S., & Dej, E., (2017). *A New Direction: A Framework for Homelessness Prevention*. Toronto: Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press. pg. 25. **http://homelesshub.ca/ANewDirection**.

10.2 Support communities to invest in qualifying initiatives that align with a clear definition of prevention such as those contained in the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Prevention Framework that address:

a. early intervention and outreach (people at imminent risk of homelessness);

b. people exiting public systems who are at imminent risk of homelessness (child protection, corrections, in-patient health care);

c. evictions prevention;

d. housing stabilization programs for those who have exited homelessness;

e. advocacy for individuals and systems navigation supports; and

f. enhancing family and natural supports to keep families intact and in a stable housing situation.

10.3 Pursue opportunities for partnership and co-funding of homelessness prevention. As many of the key drivers of homelessness are other public institutions, there are opportunities to work collaboratively with other federal departments and other orders of government to align priorities and reduce the flow of individuals and families into homelessness.

10.4 Support the collection of real-time person-specific data on everyone experiencing homelessness in Canada to give communities and the federal government visibility of inflow into homelessness and the data to target interventions and policy change to prevent homelessness.

11. Realizing the right to housing for Canadians experiencing homelessness

In the National Housing Strategy, the Government has taken a rights-based approach stating clearly that: "Canadians deserve safe and affordable housing. That is why the federal government is taking [...] additional steps to **progressively implement the right of every Canadian to access adequate housing**"[22] [emphasis added]. The National Housing Strategy also states: "Our plan is grounded in the principles of inclusion, accountability, participation and non-discrimination, and will contribute to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and **affirm the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** [emphasis added]."[23]

[22] Government of Canada. (2017). *Canada's National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home*. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. pg. 8. **https://www.placetocallhome.ca/**.

[23] Government of Canada. (2017). *Canada's National Housing Strategy: A Place to Call Home*. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada. pg. 8. **https://www.placetocallhome.ca/**.

Discussion

In a press release following the announcement of the National Housing Strategy, Ms. Leilani Farha, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, said that "Homelessness is the most egregious violation of the right to housing and other human rights." Farha noted that Canada joined 192 other states in adopting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and a commitment to end homelessness by 2030 is in keeping with Goal 11 of the SDGs.

In a subsequent consultation, Farha provided the following advice on the Right to Housing and Canada's immediate obligation to eliminate homelessness.[24]

- Rights-based housing strategies [...] must include the obligation to progressively realize the right to adequate housing by all appropriate means to the maximum of available resources.
- Strategies must map a process through which the right to housing will be fulfilled within a reasonable timeframe. Provisions are required to ensure not only entitlements in the present (immediate obligations) but also action-oriented obligations over time (progressive realization obligations).
- Because a state is seen to be in violation of international human rights law if any significant portion of the population is deprived of basic shelter or housing, addressing homelessness must be an immediate obligation. Immediate obligations also include guarantees of non-discrimination with respect to housing, security of tenure, health and safety requirements and emergency shelter. Further immediate obligations are commensurate with resources and other factors, but a state will only have lack of resources as a defence against fulfilling an immediate obligation if it can demonstrate that it has made every effort to use all available resources to satisfy as a priority the obligation.
- With respect to progressive realization standards found in Article 2(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) has stated in its General Comment No. 4 on the right adequate housing that this means, "[i]n essence, the obligation is to demonstrate that, in aggregate, the measures being taken are sufficient to realize the right for every individual in the shortest possible time in accordance with the maximum of available resources." This standard should be applied in order to establish which obligations are achievable in the present and which are to be assigned to a reasonable future date. Differences in capacity means that a future obligation in some states must be recognized as an immediate obligation in others.

[24] Telephone conversations and email with Committee member Tim Richter, December 2017.

If the Government of Canada is planning the progressive realization of the Right to Housing, if it "affirm[s] the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights" and if it seeks to meaningfully contribute to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals then it has an immediate obligation under international law to develop a strategy for the elimination of homelessness, to prioritize resources available to addressing homelessness and to take action as urgently as reasonably possible to eliminate homelessness.

In addition to our recommendations on the future of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, there are three measures the federal government should begin immediately toward eliminating homelessness and the realization of the Right to Housing for people experiencing homelessness in Canada.

Commitment and plan to eliminate homelessness

Recommendations contained in this report include many foundational elements of a national plan to prevent and end homelessness (e.g. a national definition of homelessness, a shift to community system planning, a National Homelessness Data Strategy, leadership on homelessness prevention and coordination of federal action) that combined with the National Housing Strategy could be a strong start on eliminating homelessness and meeting immediate obligations.

The Committee believes that the missing element is a clearly stated, time-bound and measurable commitment, on the part of the Government of Canada, to prevent and end homelessness along with a plan to achieve that goal (mapping a process through which the right to housing will be fulfilled within a reasonable timeframe) uniting various federal government programs and initiatives under a comprehensive strategy. This strategy would be:

- a roadmap for coordinated federal action;
- a basis for better targeting of National Housing Strategy investments; and
- a vehicle for collaboration with provinces, territories, local governments and Indigenous leadership toward the goal of ending homelessness and the realization of the right to housing for people experiencing homelessness in Canada.

Prioritize National Housing Strategy investments

The National Housing Strategy re-establishes federal government leadership on housing and invests $40 billion in housing and homelessness. Canada could achieve large-scale reductions in homelessness in Canada if the National Housing Strategy investments are better targeted to people at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Responsibility to Assist

People experiencing homelessness in Canada have regular and frequent interactions with federal, provincial, territorial and municipal government systems. These systems can often either fail to act or may even cause a person's homelessness. Far too many homeless individuals are released

from government systems (e.g. child welfare, hospitals and correctional facilities) into homelessness. Experiences of homelessness can also be a direct result of public processes and decisions made by public agencies and provisional housing providers funded by government.

These systems exist within all orders of government, and all orders of government share jurisdiction for Canadian obligations under international law. Federal/provincial-territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments each play a role and have jurisdiction over the issues and systems which contribute significantly to homelessness and have a responsibility to work to meet Canada's immediate obligations to address homelessness.

The Committee recommends the Government of Canada first develop a Responsibility to Assist protocol for itself. It should then work with the provinces, territories, municipal and Indigenous governments to develop and implement a Responsibility to Assist protocol for public agencies. This includes, but is not limited to: the military, child welfare organizations, correctional institutions, police services, immigration detention centres and hospitals. The protocol would be modelled on the regulations in place for doctors, police officers and social workers who observe intimate partner violence or suspect child abuse or neglect and are required to intervene.

The Responsibility to Assist protocol at the federal level would apply to the following departments: Public Safety Canada, Health Canada, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs, Indigenous Services Canada, Correctional Services Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada.

A Responsibility to Assist protocol would put a positive obligation on these public agencies to inquire about a person's housing status and act to resolve a person's homelessness where needed. An individual may refuse assistance or have already identified accommodation, but the protocol would eliminate the current practice of assuming individuals have access to appropriate housing.

The Responsibility to Assist protocol would not require responsible agencies to build, fund or provide housing, but instead creates an obligation to assist and respond to people in their care who are identified as being at risk of homelessness or established situational vulnerabilities placing them in need of housing assistance.

Recommendations

11.1 The Committee recommends that the Government of Canada create and commit to a national strategy to eliminate homelessness. The Strategy would provide a roadmap for federal action, a basis for targeting National Housing Strategy investments and a vehicle for collaboration with provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments.

11.2 The Committee recommends that the Government better target the National Housing Strategy to people at risk of experiencing homelessness by:

- ensuring that new housing investments ensure affordable housing created and that housing benefits are modelled to ensure people on provincial income supports and supportive housing are prioritized;
- coordinating investments in new safe, affordable and supportive housing with local Homelessness Partnering Strategy community plans; and
- targeting the Canada Housing Benefit specifically to people experiencing homelessness and those in extreme core housing need and ensuring it is delivered to individuals and not tied to a housing unit.

11.3 The Committee recommends that a Responsibility to Assist protocol be developed across federal departments and agencies, and within funding program requirements, and that this protocol be written into National Housing Strategy enabling legislation, as this is the best way to realize a rights-based approach to housing as announced in the Strategy.

12. Aligning the Homelessness Partnering Strategy with the National Housing Strategy and coordinating federal action on homelessness

Preventing and reducing chronic and episodic homelessness requires close coordination between federal strategies that aim to support the most vulnerable in society by improving their ability to participate fully in their communities.

Discussion

Committee members note that preventing and reducing chronic and episodic homelessness requires close coordination between the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, the National Housing Strategy, the upcoming Canadian Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Strategy to Prevent and Address Gender-Based Violence and multiple federal departments and agencies (e.g. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Veterans Affairs Canada, Indigenous Services).

In the United States, the United States Interagency Council coordinates the federal response to homelessness by working in partnership with 19 federal agencies. By organizing and supporting leaders such as governors, mayors, continuum of care leaders and other local officials, it supports action to achieve the goals of the federal strategic plan to prevent homelessness.

The Committee also wants to specifically highlight the opportunity presented with the National Housing Strategy to implement a national portable housing benefit program. A national portable housing benefit is a payment (like a rent supplement) made directly to households to reduce high housing costs. It is the most immediate and effective way to address severe core housing need, alleviate core housing need and provide assistance to households at risk of or experiencing homelessness. It would serve as a vital reinforcement to the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and create the best strategy to sustain success in ending re-entry into homelessness. Research shows that the vast majority of Canadians (over 85 percent) who experience homelessness are homeless solely as a result of housing affordability issues.

Recommendations

12.1 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy be aligned, coordinated and attention paid to creating specific overlaps of programs for seamless service delivery with the National Housing Strategy so that both strategies are mutually reinforcing and federal housing investments support homelessness prevention and reduction goals with a particular focus on addressing the systematic colonization of Indigenous Peoples.

12.2 The Homelessness Partnering Strategy funding to be eligible to stack with other housing programs to create a more effective and robust program, in particular, the restriction that Homelessness Partnering Strategy dollars be spent on private housing no longer be a condition.

12.3 For Employment and Social Development Canada to develop a federal coordinating body, modelled on the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, to coordinate Canada's federal efforts to prevent and reduce homelessness.

12.4 The goals of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and the Poverty Reduction Strategy be mutually reinforcing and that any new income supports introduced by the Government of Canada not lead to a reduction in an individual's existing income supports.

12.5 The language contained in the National Housing Strategy that sets a 50 percent target for reducing chronic homelessness among "shelter users" is framed in a way that is discriminatory towards women and youth because of the way in which they experience homelessness. The Committee recommends that this language be corrected by removing the reference to shelter usage.

APPENDIX 1

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action

Reconciliation

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission defined reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships and outlined 10 guiding principles of truth and reconciliation to assist Canadians in moving forward.[25]

These principles have been included here for reference, and to reinforce the idea that housing is a critical way to realize Indigenous rights through a housing program.

1. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.
2. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, as the original peoples of this country and as self-determining peoples, have Treaty, constitutional, and human rights that must be recognized and respected.

[25] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada *What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation*. **http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Principles_2015_05_31_web_o.pdf**.

3. Reconciliation is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing, apology, and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms.

4. Reconciliation requires constructive action on addressing the ongoing legacies of colonialism that have had destructive impacts on Aboriginal peoples' education, cultures and languages, health, child welfare, the administration of justice, and economic opportunities and prosperity.

5. Reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health, and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

6. All Canadians, as Treaty peoples, share responsibility for establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships.

7. The perspectives and understandings of Aboriginal Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers of the ethics, concepts, and practices of reconciliation are vital to long-term reconciliation.

8. Supporting Aboriginal peoples' cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential.

9. Reconciliation requires political will, joint leadership, trust building, accountability, and transparency, as well as a substantial investment of resources.

10. Reconciliation requires sustained public education and dialogue, including youth engagement, about the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, as well as the historical and contemporary contributions of Aboriginal peoples to Canadian society.

To redress the legacy of residential schools, and advance reconciliation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission created 94 Calls to Action.[26]

Child Welfare

1. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care by:

   ii. Providing adequate resources to enable Aboriginal communities and child-welfare organizations to keep Aboriginal families together where it is safe to do so, and to keep children in culturally appropriate environments, regardless of where they reside.

   v. Requiring that all child-welfare decision makers consider the impact of the residential school experience on children and their caregivers.

3. We call upon all levels of government to fully implement Jordan's Principle.

[26] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2012). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, MB: **http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf**.

Language and culture

13. We call upon the federal government to acknowledge that Aboriginal rights include Aboriginal language rights.

Health

18. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies, including residential schools, and to recognize and implement the health-care rights of Aboriginal people as identified in international law, constitutional law, and under the Treaties.

20. In order to address the jurisdictional disputes concerning Aboriginal people who do not reside on reserves, we call upon the federal government to recognize, respect, and address the distinct health needs of the Métis, Inuit, and off-reserve Aboriginal peoples.

21. We call upon the federal government to provide sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools, and to ensure that the funding of healing centres in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is a priority.

22. We call upon those who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients.

Reconciliation: Canadian Governments and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

43. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fully adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the framework for reconciliation.

44. We call upon the Government of Canada to develop a national action plan, strategies, and other concrete measures to achieve the goals of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

National Council for Reconciliation

55. We call upon all levels of government to provide annual reports or any current data requested by the National Council for Reconciliation so that it can report on the progress towards reconciliation. The reports or data would include, but not be limited to:

    ii. Comparative funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves.

Education for Reconciliation

65. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

APPENDIX 2

Letter to the Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, and Parliamentary Secretary Adam Vaughan (Housing and Urban Affairs)

TO: **Jean-Yves Duclos**,
Minister of Families,
Children and Social Development

Adam Vaughan,
Parliamentary Secretary
to the Minister of Families,
Children and Social Development

FROM: **Pierre Gaudreau**,
Director, RAPSIM

Jimena Michea,
Coordinator, RAIIQ

SUBJECT: Notes on the Final Report of the Advisory Committee on Homelessness

As members of the Advisory Committee on Homelessness, we have had the privilege, during visits to several Canadian cities, of sharing thoughts and ideas with stakeholders working to prevent and reduce homelessness. We welcome the federal government's initiative in conducting

a broad consultation on homelessness across Canada. We also wish to acknowledge the undeniable commitment of the committee members and the Parliamentary Secretary in addressing homelessness.

However, with the work finalized, we feel it is important to express reservations regarding the vision and directions contained in the final report. We would also like to highlight components of the federal government's Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) that have so far been helpful in preventing and reducing homelessness in Quebec and that we believe should be retained.

Local community planning

Local community planning has been instrumental in implementing homelessness initiatives in Quebec.

This planning has provided an opportunity for communities to bring together a number of players from the various sectors involved to develop a global vision to address homelessness and to take concerted actions to prevent and reduce homelessness. It has made it possible to respond effectively to the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Community planning has fostered the implementation of a range of interventions tailored to community needs. For example, the choices made in Québec and Montréal over the past 18 years have been very different but equally relevant to address homelessness. In Québec, a strong emphasis has been placed on prevention and actions for youth whereas, in Montréal, local priorities, except as part of Housing First under HPS 2015-2019, have always enabled the significant use of funds for the development of organisations' facilities and social housing.

Local community planning must remain an option.

Global approach

The desire to prioritize a specific approach to address homelessness also remains a major area of disagreement. Although Housing First is an effective approach to increasing access to housing for people experiencing homelessness, it cannot address the multiple aspects of homelessness. Homelessness is complex. Intervention to prevent and reduce homelessness must address housing along with health and social services, income, education and inclusion, cohabitation, and the criminal justice system. The government must also address prejudice, stigma and exclusion in relation to people.

As we stated during the meetings of the committee and as was also stated by various people at the Québec and Montréal roundtables, homelessness requires a multitude of responses. Street work, food aid, social and occupational integration programs, the renovation and construction of shelters and drop-in centres, and community housing support are all responses to the diverse needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. A holistic approach that covers all dimensions of the reality of people experiencing homelessness is essential to an effective response.

We feel that imposing a systemic approach to homelessness management is dangerous and counterproductive for building and maintaining relationships with a significant proportion of people experiencing homelessness and contrary to the approach of a large number of organizations.

Upstream intervention

An effective homelessness program must also make it possible to take action to prevent homelessness. In Quebec, homelessness is defined as a process of disaffiliation marked by multiple disruptions and ultimately leading to life on the street. Access to affordable and adequate housing, transition after discharge from an institution, and support for families and youth in need are all interventions that will help avoid homelessness.

A social safety net (for example housing, income and access to services) is an important protective factor that helps prevent homelessness and reduce the likelihood of chronicity among people experiencing homelessness.

Conclusion

We realize that the review of the HPS is not simple. The realities expressed across Canada are diverse, reflecting the myriad faces of homelessness. Communities need a flexible program to prevent and reduce homelessness.

APPENDIX 3

Members of the Advisory Committee on Homelessness

Adam Vaughan (Chair)	Member of Parliament for Spadina Fort-York and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs)
Robert Byers	Regina, Saskatchewan President and CEO, Namerind Housing Corporation Chair, Indigenous Caucus, Canadian Housing and Renewal Association
Amanda DiFalco	Hamilton, Ontario Manager, Homelessness Policy and Programs, City of Hamilton

Stephen Gaetz	Toronto, Ontario Professor, Faculty of Education, York University and Director of the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness/Homeless Hub
Pierre Gaudreau	Montréal, Quebec Coordinator, Réseau d'aide aux personnes seules et itinérants de Montréal (RAPSIM)
Arlene Haché	Yellowknife, Northwest Territories Community Advocate and Program Developer Temiskaming Native Women's Support Group
Charlotte Hrenchuk	Whitehorse, Yukon Executive Director, Yukon Status of Women Council
Holly Jarrett	Wakefield, Quebec Co-founder and Member, Lived Experienced Advisory Council, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness
Susan McGee	Edmonton, Alberta CEO, Homeward Trust Edmonton
Katherine McParland	Kamloops, British Columbia Youth Homelessness Manager, United Way Thompson Nicola Cariboo / A Way Home Committee to End Youth Homelessness
Jimena Michea	Québec, Quebec Coordinator, Regroupement pour l'aide aux itinérants et itinérantes de Québec
Karen O'Shannacery	Vancouver, British Columbia Former Executive Director, Lookout Emergency Aid Society
Bruce Pearce	St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador Community Development Worker, End Homelessness St. John's
Tim Richter	Calgary, Alberta President and CEO, Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness